

Accession Number A/4

Classification

Date: 24 April 1974 7:00-8:30 p.m.

Place: Evanston 1739 McDaniel

Interview with: Thomas Garnett

Interviewed by: S.F. Patton

Observations: Interview held in private home. Although interview concerned generally with Black community in Evanston, the purpose was to obtain information about Black's occupations. The interviewee was very cooperative and cordial. Mr. Garnett is a printer.

1. Q. What's your name

A. Thomas Herman Garnett

2. Q. When were you born

A. Sept. 16, 1920

3. Q. Where

A. Evanston

4. Q. What is your occupation

A. A printer

5. Q. Why type of printing

A. Off-set. I had my own shop. I also did letter-press. The letter-press is for newspaper print. It is hand set

6. Q. What is off-set

A. Printing from plates; indirect print. It a lithographic process

7. Q. How long have you been printing

A. A few years. I ran a press part-time. For three years, I worked with the printing press full time with my brother. It developed from a hobby. We had a printing business

8 Q. When

A. Oh, from 1951 to 1957

9 Q. You worked part-time first

A. Yes, then full-time. While I was printing part-time I was working for Northwestern 's Traffic Institute. I was doing printing the first year and I had stock duties as well

10 Q. You and your brother opened business first together

A. Yes. We ran the business until 1953 at night. The shop was on 1950 Simpson. After my brother graduated from high school in 1953, he worked in the day. I started in the day in 1955. I had ambitions also of being a court reporter; I took and learned short-hand.

11 Q. Were you young at the time you wished to be a court reporter

A. I was in my early twenties. I also thought of becoming an accountant, I progress as far as cost accounting.

12 Q. As far as cost accounting

A. Yes, In 1947 I took courses in accounting at Central Y College

13 Q. What is your brother's name

A. Vincent

14 Q. Is he the oldest

A. No. Winfield is the oldest. There's Winfield, me Irene and Vincent

15 Q. What grammar school did you attend

A. Old Foster. When I was there we students stayed in one room the whole day except to eat

16 Q. Were there any Black teachers at Foster

A. No. No, wait yes, there was one. A Physical Education teacher---Charles Boyer

17 Q. Did you attend Evanston Township H.S.

A. Yes, for four years

18 Q. Any other schooling , eg. college, technical school after that

A. Le me go back to Foster. I remember my Mother and her friends attempting to have Blacks as teachers at Foster. It was during the Depression and many Blacks---those who had employed husbands feared they might lose their jobs if they protested the lack of Black teachers at Foster. Those students from Haven and Nichols were better prepared. For example, no science was taught at Foster, only social science. The students had no preparation for Evanston Township

19 Q. Did any Black attend Havens and Nichols

A. My brother went to Haven. My mother tried to ge me enrolled in Haven, but didn't succeed. Foster w as quite an inferior school. There were larger, older students than myself in the same grade; I guess these students were indicative of the influx of people from the South. They were 4 to 5 years older than me

20 Q. Were your parents born here

A. No. My father was from Augusta, Ga. My mother was from Millageville, Ga.

21 Q. When did they arrive

A. 1913

22 Q. Where did they live

A. Claridge. 319 Dempster. They roomed with a Mrs Boyd. My earliest recollection of an address is 1310 Foster St

23 Q. Did Blacks live anywhere in Evanston that you can remember

A. They seemed to have lived in other areas

24 Q. When was the Black community condensed

A. LI can't remember. There were Whites and Blacks in my neighborhood at 1310 Foster

25 Q. Did it ever become completely Black

A. It was predominantly Black. There was the Ashbury Sanitarium across from Thompson Funeral Home. There was the

Lee Hotel. It was a Black hotel. Part of Greenbay Road is where the Lee Hotel originally stood. The Lee Hotel was right next to Thompson Funeral Home. Dr. Arthur Butler and Dr. Isabelle Garnett began the Ashbury Sanatorium. This was sometimes called the Butler Sanatorium.

26 Q. When was the Sanatorium founded

A. Before 1920 Before my parents came to town

27 Q. How long was it in existence

A. Let's see. It was on 1913 Brown. Adolph Penn owned a home. The City bought it from him and the Sanatorium merged with this, Penn home to form the Community Hospital. Two persons to talk to would be Dr. Hill and Dr. Fry

28 Q. Who owned the Lee Hotel

A. The Lee family. I don't know the specific names

29 Q. How long did the hotel exist

A. Around the 1930's

30 Q. Did the hotel employ all Black

A. I assume

31 Q. Did any relatives of your parents arrive in Evanston

A. My father's brother. Thomas Henry Garnett. He lived on 1310 Foster. He was the only Black soldier killed in action from Evanston during W. War I. The city changed Ayers Place to Garnett Place; Post 785 is named after him

32 Q. What type of work did your parents do

A. My mother didn't work. My father worked in the drug-store as a clerk. He spent all his working hours working in pharmacies. He was studying pharmacy. The Depression stopped his studies. My mother taught school for one year after she got married. They then came here.

33 Q. But she could get employment

A. No, I'm sure she could not even though she was capable. That's probably, now that I think about it, why she was active in obtaining permission for Black teachers to teach in Evanston. My Father finished Hampton Institute. At that time it was a

high school and college. I was never clear which he studied. He had those large red pharmaceutical books

34 Q. Where did your father study

A. I can't remember. I remember Illinois something printed on the books.

35 Q. What is your older brother's occupation

A. He is an industrial chemist

36 Q. What is your younger brother's occupation

A. He's a printer

37 Q. What is your sister's name

A. Irene

38 Q. What is her occupation

A. She is a qualitative appraiser analyst at the Social Security Board

39 Q. I believe there was an organization call the Negro or National Business League in Evanston. Do you know anything about it

A. No. I'm not certain

40 Q. Were there any Black employment agencies here

A. There was Smith Employment Agency. Mrs Smith, Melvin Smith who publishes the Evanston News Gazette, that is his mother.

41 Q. What were the majority of positions Blacks held in Evanston

A. Well, I worked at Community Hospital after finishing high school. I got \$50 per month for a 54 hr. week. Some of my friends then were working in hotels; they had menial jobs. Many of the women were domestics. The men were labourers. Most Blacks had "blue-collar" jobs.

42 Q. Were there any Black lawyers when you left high school

A. No, not too many. Let's see there were doctors and dentists, combined there were no more than ten. There are now lawyers; Charles May, Mamie Spence and Brooks.

43 Q. Were there smaller numbers ca. 1935

A. Yes. There were around two lawyers, around six doctors and two dentists. Now, maybe---I can think of only three dentists now and only around six doctors. Whether they all practice in Evanston, I don't know.

44 Q. When did the city of Evanston start hiring Negro teachers

A. Late 1950's. There was a local person, Charles Thomas hired at Evanston Township in 1950. He's now principal of North Chicago High School. He was the first Black teacher and first Black assistant football coach. My younger brother went to Nichols. During the mid '40's a group of us probably no more than twenty observed the curriculum at Foster and the other schools. Too many kids who graduated from Foster were failing. Probably because of our action, the kids couldn't bring the books home from Foster. I happened to be the secretary and treasurer

45 Q. Did the group have a name

A. I don't remember the name. The schools were aware of us. Eventually integration of schools in Evanston came about. There once were washing machines and iron boards at Foster to prepare students for menial skills. I heard this. My mother told me this. You didn't see Blacks working in the stores until after W.W.II.

46 Q. I remember my mother telling me Blacks couldn't shop at downtown Chicago, at Marshall Fields for example around that time.

A. Yes. Same here. You couldn't be served at hotels. Black workers, I heard, came through the back door. Alderman Jourdain is said to be responsible for breaking the balcony segregation in theatres. The two time I went there happened to be a friend of mine at the door-White. I went and sat in the main floor section.

47 Q. What theatres were here then

A. Valencia, Varsity and Star. There was a contest at the Star, now the parking lot of the National Bank. The prize was a car which a Black man won. The theatre refused to give him the car. W. H. Gill, he's dead now, had a newspaper then; he raised so much sand, the theatre eventually went out of business. Mr Gill was very active. His main business was real estate; I believe he also had a laundry business

48 Q. When was this

A. Probably back in the 1920's

49 Q. Did many Blacks own laundry

A. There was Lark's Laundry on Payne St. Most of the Blacks operated from homes

50 Q. Any comments of attitude of White employer and Black employees

A. During the war I worked for the U.S. Dept. of Labour at Merchandise Mart. There were Blacks in supervisory positions

51 Q. Did these jobs/positions exist in Evanston

A. Prior to W.W.II only one Black did postal work

52 Q. Any comments on the Depression

A. It had quite a negative impact. There were hardships for the students. We, the family, never had a car. We always lived sufficiently well. There was relief in Evanston, but we were never on relief.

53 Q. Do you think that the fact wealth Whites lived in Evanston help ease the effects of the Depression

A. Yes probably. Domestics brought clothing, pieces of soap and surplus food from their White employer families. This is what I heard. Many fellas didn't have a job when I worked at the hospital. I went to Central Y College for one semester during the day.

54 Q. As a Black printer, you're unique aren't you

A. Yes, I guess i am. When I was working, the White salesmen said they didn't know of any Black printers between here and Waukegan.

W. H. Twiggs was one of Evanston's early printers. His accomplishments are in the Evanston Historical Society. Mr. Charleson, he was a graduate musician had a printing business in his house

55 Q. When was this

A. In the 1930's and 1940's. Both were working at the same time. They printed tickets, etc.; it was "regular job shop."

56 Q. Did you ever marry

A. No. My sister is single. We lived together since our

parents died. My father died March 20, 1942 and my mother died October 20, 1942.

57 Q. What were your neighbors doing around the 1930's -1940's

A. There were carpenters, brickworkers, porter, etc. There were no store clerks. This is up to the early 1940's. Weiboldts was one of the first to employ Blacks as clerks during the War. I worked for the Washington National in the stockroom. I was there for six months. I soon learned I could not advance beyond the stockroom in the company. I was limited in my advancement. Then I went to Traffic at NorthWestern. They were very cordial to me even when racial bias existed at the University. I worked at Washington National until 1948. My brother got the run around there when he applies as an underwriter

